

For immediate release

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## **Flu Makes Early Appearance This Year in County**

The flu has made an unusually early appearance in Lewis and Clark County this year, public health officials said Wednesday.

Laboratory tests this week confirmed a case of influenza A in a county resident over the age of 65. Influenza A and B are different types of flu virus. Both cause seasonal epidemics of disease almost every winter in the United States.

“This is remarkably early for our first case – like three to four weeks early,” said Karen Dobson Wandel, nurse supervisor at Lewis and Clark Public Health. “So our advice is, don’t wait to get your annual flu shot. Do it now.”

About 5-20 percent of U.S. residents get the flu each year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Flu season typically peaks between December and February.

During the 2014-2015 flu season, the first case in Lewis and Clark County was reported in October. The previous season, the first case was discovered in December.

The timing of flu is very unpredictable and can vary in different parts of the country and from season to season. Most seasonal flu activity typically occurs between October and May, and state and federal health experts don’t start officially tracking flu cases each year until Oct 1.

Since 2010, the flu has caused 5,300 to 39,000 deaths a year and as many as half a million annual hospitalizations, according to the CDC. It estimates that flu vaccines prevented close to 40,000 flu-associated deaths during the nine-year period from 2005 to 2014.

Flu, or influenza, is highly contagious and can cause severe disease even in those who are young and healthy. High-risk populations like young children, the elderly, and people with chronic health conditions such as heart and lung disease and diabetes, are particularly vulnerable to serious complications.

Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Flu may also worsen underlying chronic medical conditions.

People with flu can spread it to others up to three feet away. Most experts believe flu viruses are spread mainly by droplets expelled when people cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can contaminate surfaces and be spread by touching those surfaces or by directly inhaling the droplets.

*The mission of Lewis and Clark Public Health is to improve and protect  
the health of all Lewis and Clark County residents.*

The CDC recommends an annual flu vaccination for everyone 6 months and older to protect against the disease. The vaccine is safe and takes two weeks to become effective.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent flu. Other precautions include:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water.
- Avoiding close contact with sick people.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

If you do get sick, stay home and limit your contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

The health department offers flu shots and other immunizations on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 1930 Ninth Avenue. No appointment is needed.

For more information, call your medical provider or the health department's flu hotline at 457-8904 or visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season-2015-2016.htm>.

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